

The great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scriptures.

A
SERMON

PREACH'D

At the Chapel in Newgate,

On Sunday, October 30, 1709.

JOHN v. Ver. 39.

—Search the Scriptures.

By THOMAS GREENE, M. A.

Publish'd at the Request of the Gentlemen of the
PRESS-TARD.

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Gentlemen of the Press-Yard.

Gentlemen,

I AM very sensible that it is too great an Honour which is done me, by the general Approbation which this plain Discourse met with from you, and am willing to conclude, that your desire to have it made publick, proceeds from your zealous Acknowledgments of the necessity of practising the great Duty therein express'd and enforc'd. When a Motion was first made that I should be desir'd to preach before you, I was very willing to comply with your Request; and if I have in so doing contributed any Ways to your spiritual Advantage, and have been serviceable to you in respect of the greatest Concern, I have all the Reason in the World to look upon the time I spent with you, well employ'd, and shall ever reckon it as honourable a Task to bestow my Labours in a Prison, upon distressed Captives, as in a Pallace on a more splendid Audience.

And if the World shall receive this Discourse, now 'tis Printed; but as favourably as you did when it was Preach'd, the Pains which I have bestow'd upon it, will be sufficiently Rewarded; and if any good shall accrue thereby, it must chiefly be owing to your good Intentions, who are willing that others should, as well as you, be Partakers of the Benefit of God's most Holy Word, by receiving it into a Sincere and an Honest Heart.

I am, Gentlemen,

your most Affectionate Freind,

and Obliged Humble Servant,

Tho. Greene.

Search the Scriptures. Jo. v. Ver. 39.

BY the Scriptures here in the Text, we are to understand the Writings of the Old Testament, on which the *Jews* so much depended, and believ'd, that through the performance of the Mosaical Precepts, they should have Eternal Life. Our Saviour in this Place, bids them search into 'em, and upon a due Examination they should find all the Prophecies and Types therein contained, fulfill'd in him, and that all the Promises of Life therein made, have an Aspect on Him, the Great Author and Giver of Life. But alas! the Worship of God prescrib'd by the Law in the Old Testament, was chiefly External and Ceremonial, and was very Expensive, as it consisted of an innumerable Company of Sacrifices and Oblations. This at best was but a shadow of far better things to come, which should Commence in the World, upon the Birth of Christ, and most of the Promises of it were Temporal and Confin'd to this Life. If therefore (as we may Reasonably do) we take the Word Scriptures in a larger and more comprehensive Sense, we must include therein the Gospel of Christ, and the Writings of his Apostles, wherein an Internal and Spiritual Obedience is Enjoyn'd, and the Motives thereunto are far more engaging and powerful, than all that has been suggested by *Moses* and the Prophets. In this Latitude therefore.

I. I shall consider the great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scriptures. And then,

II. I shall in several Instances show how our Value and Esteem for them ought to be Exercis'd and Express'd, and in my Exortations to you, for to search them, shall give you some short Directions.

I am to consider the great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scriptures. And this will appear if we consider that in these Blessed Writings, we make new

and large Discoveries of the Divine Beauties and Perfections; view a Glorious Portraiture of our Maker, acquaint our selves with the most perfect Being, and have as clear a Manifestation of his Glorious Attributes, as we are capable of acquiring in this Mortal State. Sure it cannot but be entertaining to a Rational Creature, to contemplate on the Works of its great Creatour, to observe one while his Justice, at other times his Mercy, then to Admire his Wisdom, and to Praise him for his Goodness. Here are we furnish'd with the bright and shining Examples of many Pious and Devout Men, who extremely delighted in Praising God, and in having a Comfortable Intercourse with him. And tho' the Tongues of Men, or of Angels, are unable to express the noble Acts of the Lord, or show forth all his Praise, yet we have here a Rich Magazine of Expressions, which are very seasonable and proper for us to use in all our Thanksgivings: Here are Hymns and Anthems, and Songs of Triumph, and how conceited soever some Persons may be of their own Wit and Parts, no Book is able to inspire them with a more greatful Sense of God's love and goodness, or direct them to Praise him after a nobler Manner.

Here are we taught to trust in the living God, to receive Evil as well as Good at his Hands, to depend upon him for the Necessaries as well as Conveniencies of this Life, and the hopes of a better, to implore his succour in all our Straits and Exigencies, to beseech him to remove from us all hurtful things, and to give us all those things which be profitable for us.

Here have we a Description of the Transcendent love of God to the vilest and most Abject of Creatures. Here as much of the Miraculous Work of our Redemption as Human sight can bear, is expos'd to our view, and propos'd as worthy of our most serious Thoughts.

Here

Here we behold (if we can behold or consider without shedding Rivers of Tears) the unspeakable Condescension of a bleeding Saviour, *who tho' he thought it no robbery to be equal with God, took upon him the form of a Servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*, Phil. ch. 2. Here are represented unto us those Emblems of the Body and Blood of Christ, which he commands us frequently to be Partakers of in Commemoration of his Sufferings, and says upon the Institution of this Sacrament, *Do this in remembrance of me*, Luke 22. 19. Here also is set forth the necessity of that other Sacrament Baptism, which is a Token of Regeneration or a new Birth, a cleansing and washing from the Pollutions of Sin. This we have our blessed Lord's command for, *when he bids his Disciples go and teach all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*, Math. 28. 19.

Here have we a most noble Employment for our Minds to study the will of God, and reflect upon the Reasonableness and Excellency of those wise Laws by which he governs the Universe.

Such great delight had Holy David, in the Study of these Laws, that Day and Night he meditated upon them, and made it the Character of his blessed Man so to do. *He desir'd them more than Gold, yea than fine Gold, they were sweeter unto him than Honey, or the Honey Comb*, Plal. 19. 10. Intimating by these Elegant Expressions, that in the happy Effects which they are fitted to have upon us, and the great Advantages which we may derive from them, they are of more use to us, and yeild more real Pleasure and Satisfaction, then all the sensual Enjoyments and Delights of this Transitory World.

And if he in his Time could set such a Value upon the Sacred Writings, and give them so large an Encomium, when many of those great Things which are now plainly and largely made known to us, were but

sparingly and obscurely reveal'd; how much more ought we to prize them in these our Days, who are acquainted with the whole Council of God, as far as it concerns us, and do know all those things which belong to our Peace.

Do we seek after Knowledge, hither we may come and quench our thirst at this Sacred Fountain, from whence flow the Streams of the sublimest Wisdom? Do we want to know what our Duty is, here are we instructed how to behave our selves towards that Glorious and Eternal Being, whom if we endeavour sincerely to serve and please here, we shall see him Face to Face, and dwell for ever with him hereafter? Do we desire to know what Obedience we must pay unto our Neighbour, here the practice of all those Christian Graces and Virtues, which may promote Peace, Unity, Truth and Righteousness among Men, is injoynd us? *He hath shewed thee O Man! what is good; for what does the Lord require of thee, but to do Justice, to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God, Micha. 6. 8.*

The Holy Scripture, our Excellent Church declares in her 6th Article, contains all Things necessary to Salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, or may be prov'd thence, is not requir'd of any Man, that it should be believed as an Article of Faith, or be thought requisite and necessary to Salvation. These therefore (as St. Paul saith, 2 Tim. 3. 17.) are able to make *the Man of God perfect, thoroughly furnish'd to every good Work.* Here all that is Wise and Good, all that is agreeable to right Reason, and fit for us to do, all that is productive of our present or future Happiness, is propos'd to our practice, and all that is absur'd and irrational, all that is impure, all that is of ill report, all that is misbecoming the Dignity of our Natures, and the Nobleness of our Profession, all that is a hindrance to the welfare either of our Souls or Bodies, is strictly forbidden.

The utmost perfection of all Virtue, which the Heathen Philosophers by the light of unguided Nature could never attain to, is here delineated by the sublimest Rules of
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all Holy Living. 'Tis the p̄culiār Excellency of these Divine Writings, to lay a stress upon all our Thoughts as well as our Words and Works, to curb all our vicious Inclinations, and regulate every Motion of our Souls, and that for this very Reason, (as the Author to the Hebrews observes, Chap. 4. 12.) *Because God is a discoverer of the thoughts and intents of the Heart,* or (as St. Paul speaks, Rom. 2. 16.) *God shall judge the secrets of Men by Jesus Christ, according to his Gospel.*

God knows us far better than we do our selves, and has therefore wisely suited his Laws to the Nature of those beings which are to be govern'd by them, and if we well observe them, we shall find them exactly opposite to all the Extravagancies of our Minds, to those Lusts, Humours, and Worldly Interests, by which we are too frequently Biass'd.

And indeed had not God had a peculiar Regard to our most secret Imaginations, as well as our outward Actions, the Scriptures would not have been a perfect Scheme for Example of Life and Instructions in Manners, as they must now be confess'd to be; or had they given any check to those Lusts which was in our Members, which pollute those Bodies which should be Temples of the Holy Ghost, and render those Souls impure, which are design'd for those purer Regions of Bliss and Glory, which no unclean Spirits can ever enter. Here therefore we may learn to cure all our fond Errours and Defects, to triumph over the most alluring Temptations, and possess our selves of all noble and excellent Qualities.

Here we have many great and signal Instances of God's Displeasure against Sin, and of those terrible Judgments which have been brought upon the World by it, and have great Examples of Piety and Faith in God set before us. Christ himself, the great Author and Finisher of our Faith, of whom the World was not worthy, has made the easiest and most perspicuous Comment upon the seemingly hard and austere Injunctions of his Gospel, and has by his own Self-denial, Humility, Meekness, Charity and Patience, by a noble and generous Contempt of the World, and the Glories of it, left us an Example that we should follow his Steps, and has commanded us to do and suffer nothing but what he in our Nature did before us.

II. The wholsome Rules of this Divine Book, reach to all the Circumstances and Conditions of Life, and give us Comfort and Ease under all our Calamities and Troubles. *Come hither all ye that are weary and heavy laden (saith our Blessed Saviour) and ye shall find rest unto your Souls, Matth. 11. 28.*

Come hither you Sons and Daughters of Affliction, learn to bear your Sufferings with Submission and Patience; kiss the Rod which Chastises you, learn here to be thankful for the Corrections of your Heavenly Father, and look upon them either as Tryals of your Sincerity, or Marks of his Love and Favour, who can make your light Afflictions, which are but for a Moment, to work for you a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory, *2 Cor. 4. 17.*

Come hither all you that are Revil'd and Persecuted for Righteousness sake, faint not in your Minds; nor cast off your Care from God, but rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your Reward in Heaven, *Matth. 5. 12.*

Come hither all you that Murmur at the seemingly unequal Dispensations of Providence, be sensible that your present scanty Enjoyments, as unthankful as you are for them, are more than you deserve, and learn hence what soever State you are in, therewith to be content, *Phil. 4. 11.*

Come hither all you that are Sick, and that daily labour under many bodily Infirmities and Diseases, and learn hence that God will give you all needful supports under them, and cause those Bones which now are broken, hereafter to Rejoice, will Sanctifie unto you all your Weakness and Imperfections, and turn them into far greater Blessings than you can either Desire or Deserve.

This is the comfortable Language of these Sacred Writings, which will Raise our drooping Spirits, give fresh Recruits to the Faint and Feeble; Administer Delight and joy to the Oppressed and Sorrowful, and give vigour and security to all. Here then let us listen unto God, who often speaks to his Afflicted and Distressed Creatures, and bids them look up to Heaven; and see that bright Crown which is prepar'd for all those who without murmuring and distrust, set easy under the Changes and Chances of this Mortal Life. But above all, here let us see our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who Despis'd no Shame, and Declin'd no Sufferings, for the joy that was

set before him ; here let us see and imitate him at the head of the Glorious Company of the Apostles, the goodly Fellowship of the Prophets, and the noble Army of Martyrs.

Let me more especially (and despise not I beseech you my Labour of Love) exhort you to have a due Sense of God's Afflicting Hand which is now upon you, as also of the great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scriptures, which Accommodate themselves to your present Circumstances. You are here chearfully Assembl'd in God's House for his Service, and Happy is it for you that you have his most Holy Word Read and Preach'd to you. Your Captivity will be matter of Triumph, and your Chains will set easy, if you (as these Holy Scriptures advise) bear your present Troubles with Patience and Resignation to the Divine Will. Acquaint your selves then with God and his most Holy Word, delight in his Statutes, and turn your Feet unto his Testimonies. *Seek you after God (saith David) and your Soul shall live ; for the Lord beareth the Poor and despiseth not his Prisoners,* Psal. 69. 34. Believe me (my Christian Brethren) Religion is the best support for troubl'd Minds, and a Prison tho' it is not a proper place for sensual Joys, yet will it (if 'tis not abus'd) furnish your Souls with many Ravishing and spiritual Delights. Tho' you are confin'd, you have at the sametime by the free Exercise of your Religion, the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God, who will cause light out of darkness to arise to all those who delight in him ; will shortly put an end to all your Sorrows, wipe all Tears forever from your Eyes, and raise you far above the Storms of a miserable World. You will then with pleasure look back upon your Imprisonment, and Rejoice in that you have been thus Afflicted. Instead then of murmuring at the good Providence of God, who knows far better than you do your selves, what is most convenient for you, in Patience possess you your Souls, instead of Riot and Excess, or drowning the Sense of your Condition with the fumes of Wine and strong Drink, instead of diverting that Melancholly which should turn to a good Account ; be Conversant with the Holy Scriptures, and Read them with inward Satisfaction. They will (as I hope you will all by Experience find) compose the jarrings of your tumultuous Passions, teach you to correct your former Errors, to

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Repent off, and be sorry for them, and will for the time to come cause you to yeild a more perfect Obedience to your God, and to be less offensive in every respect to your Christian Neighbours and Brethren.

III. The great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scriptures, will further appear, if we consider that we have therein the most powerful Motives and Encouragements, to keep our selves stedfast in the Practice of our Duty as can possibly be afforded. The Practice of Virtue indeed ensures to us many great and valuable temporal Blessings, such as Health, long Life, ease of Mind, and the esteem of the World. *Length of days (saith Solomon) is in her right hand, and in her left hand are Riches and Honour, her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are Peace, Prov. 3. 16. 17.* But least these Considerations which to a Rational Creature might seem weighty enough, should be thought but slender Encouragements for Men to deny themselves, and mortify their darling Lusts and Affections; Christ who has call'd us to Glory and Virtue by the knowledge of himself, has given to us exceeding great and precious Promises, that we may be made Partakers of the Divine Nature; *having escap'd the Corruption that is in the World through Lusts, and that an Entrance may be Minister'd to us abundantly in his everlasting Kingdom, 2 Pet. 1 Chap. 3. 4.* *By thy Judgments (saith the Royal Psalmist) is thy Servant taught, and in keeping them there is great Reward, Psal. 19. 11.* And the Author to the Hebrews, Chap. 11. 6. *Says, that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and St. Paul, 1 Tim. 4. 8. Says, that godliness is profitable unto all things, having the Promises of the Life that now is, and that which is to come.*

When this World and the Fashion of it which soon passes away, shall be at an End; we shall (these Scriptures tell us) enter upon a State of perfect joy and Felicity, as a reward of our Obedience here below, consort with kind, peaceable and glorify'd Spirits, and enjoy God who is the Fountain of all Perfection, the truest Object of our Desires, and the Comptier of all our Happiness. We shall (they assure us) be advanc'd to the highest honour and the greatest Glory that a God of infinite power and goodness can advance us to, and have nothing more to desire or wish for than what we shall then enjoy. And certainly if the Glories of the other World as they are deliver'd

unto us in the Holy Scriptures, cannot fill our Minds with Admiration and Joy, or induce us chearfully to adorn the Doctrine of our Saviour in all Things, no meaner Consideration can: If the Thoughts of being for ever Happy both in our Souls and Bodies, can have no Effect upon us, I shall much wonder if any thing else should. On the other hand as eternal Bliss in Reversion is made over to all them that love God, so are dreadful Threatnings and Promises of endless Woe and Misery, in many places Denounc'd against the Sin and Disobedience of those that hate him, whose approaching Doom is described by those Things which are apt to be most Terrifying to Human Nature; such as Death and Destruction, a lake of Fire and Brimstone, everlasting Fire, wrath Eternal, outer Darkness, a Worm that never Dyes, &c. and as soberly as all wise and good Christians ought to think of these Things, too many are apt to look upon them as airy Speculations, fit only to be discours'd off to Children and Fools, and not to those bright Sparks who set up for Masters of Wit and Reason, and who have Notions too refin'd, and a Faith too fashionable to give Credit to any thing that is lookt upon to be out of Date.

Yet certainly no other Book in the World furnishes us with such strong Arguments against Sin, as this does; no other Book so passionately diswades us from all those vicious Courses which if persisted in, will be our Ruin: No other Book so well describes and makes known to us the Terrours of the Lord, or awakens us into a Sense of our Guilt and Danger.

And if when Sinners consider that the everlasting Wrath of an angry and offended God, shall assuredly (as these blessed Writings inform us) be reveal'd against all Unrighteousness and Ungodliness of Men, if they can quietly throw off all Dread and Fear of their future Punishment, which must be extremely Miserable both in its Degree and its Duration, Good God! What can reclaim them? What can reach or Affect them? What can melt or soften their flinty and obdurate Hearts, or make them leave and forsake those destructive Vices, the Pleasures of which endure but for a Season? Thus have I fully I hope shewn you the great Usefulness and Excellency of the Holy Scripture, I shall now proceed to my,

II. General Head, viz. to show you how our Value and Esteem for them ought to be exercis'd and express'd, and in my Exortations to you for to search them, shall give you some short Directions. We must Read them frequently, and industriously acquaint our selves with the most important Passages therein contain'd; which the more we are conversant with, the more easie and familiar will they be to us, and the greater improvement we shall happily derive from them. But for a Man to prostitute his Reason and Conscience to the vilest and most ignominious Practices, is somewhat unaccountable, and instead of taking a delight in Reading and Meditation upon the Law of the Lord, which is able to convert his Soul, and make him wise unto Salvation; for him to rake in a Sink of Ribbaldry and Folly, Immorality and Atheism, and turn over with Pleasure and Satisfaction those nauseous Books which poison his Soul, mislead his Judgment, corrupt his Principles, taint his Morals, influence his Practice, and involve Thousands in the same unhappy Circumstances, is a Consideration so surprising and yet so Melancholly that I could willingly pass it over; did not the over-ruling Examples of the wicked Age in which we live, naturally lead me to it.

There are too many I know that look upon the Bible which is the noblest Treasure God could put into our Hands, to be a very dull and insipid Book, and for many Weeks, Months, nay Years, (it is to be fear'd) afford no part of their Time for the perusal of it. A Debauch'd Play or a Libel, they will suffer to engross their precious Moments, they will have fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness, and care not for gathering any Fruit from this Tree of Heavenly Knowledge.

This you will say is far from expressing that just Esteem and Value which they ought to have for the Holy Scriptures, this is far (as Solomon Advises) *from inclining their Ears to Wisdom, or applying their Hearts unto understanding, far from seeking it as for Silver, and digging for it as for hidden Treasure*, Prov. 2. 2. 4, Verses. Not to take notice of God's Laws is a great Affront to him, who is the wise Law-giver, an indignity put upon that Sovereign Lord who is to rule us, and that great Master who is to instruct us.

Whereas we must Meditate (says Joshua, 1. Chap. 8. Ver. upon the Law of God day and night, that we may observe to do according to all that is written therein, if we would have our ways prosperous and live with good

success. The words of the Lord which he commands us, we must teach diligently to our Children, talk of them when we set in our Houses, when we walk by the way, when we lye down, and when we rise up. We must bind them as a sign upon our hands, and let them be as frontlets between our Eyes. We must write them on the posts of our Houses, and on our Gates, Deut. 6. Chap. 7. Ver. 8, 9,

We must not then be too fond of making those things the Objects of our Contemplation, which are foreign to the main end and design of our coming into the World, and neglect to think upon those wise Laws which advance our Happiness and establish our Peace. We must not be so desirous of searching and enquiring into the Secrets of Nature and Philosophy, the Mysteries of Art, or the hidden springs of Government, and be ignorant at the same time of the Motions of God's Holy Spirit, and be strangers to his reveal'd will. This sure would answer the Proverb, which I believe most of us know, and would very much call our Judgements into question.

II. As the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, they are to be read by us with the greatest Care and Attention, and to be receiv'd with the deepest Humility. A goodly frame and Temper of Mind is most dispos'd, and best qualify'd for Divine Illuminations, and a good and an honest heart (our Saviour has taught us) is the properest soil for this immortal Seed. If we consider the Majesty of that Infinite Being who vouchsafes to speak to us miserable Dust and Ashes, we cannot but have an awe upon us, whenever we have an Opportunity of hearing or reading his most Holy Word. Certainly if God speaks to us, especially in so kind and friendly a manner as he often does, it must be worth our while to hearken unto him. If Christ has appointed Officers in his Church, and Stewards in his Household and Family, we must set forward (as much as in us lyes) the great work of their Ministry, and regard the important Message upon which he has sent them to us. If they think it not much to exhort and instruct us, if they are willing to be our Guides, and to shew us the safe way wherein we must go, then sure we cannot be such Enemies to our selves, as to turn their Words behind us, or refuse to follow them with Meakness and Gratitude.

If we consider that the Divine Authority of the Scriptures is sufficiently confirm'd by the Spirit of Prophecie, which foretold such things as are beyond the skill of Art or Nature to foresee, by the power of Miracles which perform'd such things as are above the Power of Art and Nature to do, as also by the Resurrection of the great Preacher of the Gospel Christ himself, after he had been buried Three Days, sure we cannot but Read them with abundance of Attention and Care.

We must by no means pass them over after a careless and negligent Manner, or look upon them as an Amusement only to divert some melancholly Hours which lye upon our Hands, such a reception of them as this is wholly unfuitable to the dignity and goodness of our great Benefactor who is the giver of them, and to the nature of those Miserable and unworthy Creatures to whom they are given.

Matters of Faith indeed are obscure, intricate and mysterious, and for wise ends and purposes, are far above our weak Capacities to comprehend, yet tho' the Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour, the Resurrection of our mortal Bodies, &c. are apt to startle and confound us,

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yet as nothing that implys nor a Contradiction is impossible with God, so should we believe it as easy a matter for him to raise us again at last, as it was for him to create us and all things out of nothing at first. The important Truths which relate to the Holiness of our Lives, and our Instruction in Righteousness, are mostly deliver'd with great plainness and perspicuity; yet if we should at any time meet with any Difficulties or seeming Contradictions, it will become us to search the Scriptures with greater soberness and Intention of Mind, and to advise with our spiritual Pastors and Teachers who are best able to instruct us in the true meaning and Connection of such Passages. Let us therefore,

III. Resolve to obey and believe all things contain'd in these Holy Scriptures. The Lord is our Law-giver and may as he is the Sovereign Lord and Governour of the World, impose upon his Creatures whatsoever he pleases. Yet tho' he is so by right of Creation, yet is he not Arbitrary or Tyrannical, or does he lay greater burthens upon us than we are able to bear. He enjoins nothing but what advances our true and real interest in both Worlds, and what even we our selves in the calm of our Passions and in the absence of Temptations; readily acknowledge is fit for us to do. It will herefore be much better for us never to read God's Word at all, than if when we have read it, we reject and despise those things which relate either to our Faith or to our Practice. We have no reason to disquiet our selves about those of the former kind, or to rack our brains about the solution of those Mysteries which when unfolded, will do us no manner of service; for he who finds enough in the Scriptures (as we all may) to carry him to Heaven, has sufficiently answer'd the great end of his reading of them, and is happy in so doing.

We must readily and chearfully therefore give our Assent to these, and should not so much enquire how things are, as to satisfy our selves that they are. We must in our Conformity to the Will of God, in all things, testify to the World that we are proud of serving him and obeying all that he has commanded us to do, in order to our Happinels. And that this may the better be Affected, we must beware of being conceited of our own shallow Capacities, which when relied upon, will be apt to make us reckon our selves superiour in wisdom and knowledge to the All-wise Deity, and be a great hinderance to us in our progress in Religion and Virtue.

Pride and Arrogance darken the Mind, mislead our soberest Judgments, and cast a Cloud over our Understandings; they pervert the Will and cause it to be Head-strong and Refractory, they stifle the Convictions of Reason and Conscience, supplant the most Weighy and Important Truths, and introduce Error and Falshood in their stead. Humility or a modest mistrust of a Man's self will make him naturally ductile and pliable, will open his Eyes, and let him to see the wonderful Things of God's Laws, and prepare his Mind for an easie and becoming Reception of every thing therein contain'd. God resisteth the Proud, but gives Grace unto the Humble. *James 4. 6.* We must not therefore be positive and dogmatical, or be wedded to our own Opinions; but must abandon all Prejudice, and carry candid and disengag'd Spirits about us, and so we shall secure the Sense of the Scriptures and the Salvation of our Souls. We must not, Right or Wrong, force

force the Scriptures to countenance some darling Notions and Practices of our own, or endeavour to make them bear a quite different Meaning from what God design'd they should. We must not (as some unlearned Men did of whom St. Peter complain'd in his time) wrest the Scriptures to our own Destruction, and deceive our selves by perverting the letter of them, but make use of them to the discountenancing of all Errors, Factions, Heresies and Schisms, and try all the Doctrines of Men by this Touchstone, whether they be of God. Otherwise if we neglect or corrupt the Statutes of God, if we (as is the manner of many) Scoff at, Ridicule, and Sport with them. God will justly, as a Punishment to us, give us over to believe a Lie, and make us to love Darknes rather than Light.

Fourthly and Lastly, Let us be extremely thankful to Almighty God, for the unspeakable Benefit of his most Holy Word. Let us not abuse a Gift of such an inestimable Worth and Value, which if we do, we shall hereafter wish that we had never receiv'd it; and shall with Sorrow and Repentance too late confess before Angels and Men, that God's Mercies were too good for us.

O my Brethren (believe me) we ought all to be deeply sensible, that God has graciously vouchsafed to us the Happiness (a Happiness we are all unworthy of) of living in a Christian and a Protestant Country, wherein the Light of Christ's Gospel, which is hid from many, shines upon us with a glorious Lustre, wherein, instead of that Superstition and Enthusiasm which reign in other Kingdoms and Nations, we enjoy that Form of sound Words, and are blest with that Faith which was once deliver'd to the Saints.

We ought to be deeply sensible that our Religion is pure and undefiled, and such as can stand the test of the most malicious Inquisitor, that our Church is Orthodox, Primitive, and Apostolical, that our Clergy (tho' they are by venomous Libels daily made the out-cast of the People) are by the soundness of their Doctrine and the Integrity of their Lives, the Salt of the Earth, and the Pillars of it.

Let us, I beseech you, that we may have a more perfect and lasting Sense of the Happiness of our present Circumstances look a little Abroad into the World, take a melancholy Prospect of the dark Corners of the Earth, and view the sad Condition of those poor and miserable Wretches who sit in Darknes, and in the Shadow of Death, who know not God and his Truths, and are likely to perish for want of that Spiritual Nourishment which does abundantly Refresh and Cherish our Souls.

Let us earnestly pray unto God for them, that he would enlighten their Minds with Knowledge from above, that he would shedd the Benign Influence of his Holy Spirit into their Hearts; turn them from Darknes unto Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God. And let us not only Pray for them, or bestow barely a few cold Wishes upon them, but let us also (as far as we are able) help forward their Conversion and Salvation, by sending into Foreign Parts, wise and able Ministers to exhort and instruct them in the Knowledge of the Blessed Jesus, by transmitting to them Books of Piety and Devotion; and by sending to them the Holy Scriptures more especially, which when expounded to them, after such a manner as is most agreeable to their vulgar Capacities, will be of mighty Use to them. Let us in all things have a most Christian and Friendly Regard to their future Happiness,

piness, and add Daily, like the Bosom-Friends of Christ, to his Church such as shall be saved. This is the most noble and excellent of all Charities, which may in some sort or other be perform'd by the meanest of us. This is the most effectual way to bring Immorality and Atheism under Disgrace and Restraint, to make the Gospel thrive and flourish, and Religion prevail and prosper in the World. This is bringing the truest Honour and Glory unto God, making all the Kingdoms of this World to become the Kingdoms of Christ, and is testifying in the strictest Sense that just Value and Esteem which we all ought to have for the Holy Scriptures, which is the great Dury I have been exhorting you unto.

Let us also look into that Superstitious and uncharitable Community of Men, who like the *Scribes and Pharisees* of old (against whom our blessed Saviour pronounces a Woe, *Matth. 23. 13.*) take away the Key of Knowledge, and shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men, who neither go in themselves, nor suffer them that are entering, to go in, who lock up the Scriptures and the Service of God from the People in an unknown Tongue, render them incapable of knowing what is the good and acceptable Will of God, and of receiving any Benefit or Advantage from it. How cruel and barbarous is this abominable Practice? How destructive is it to the Souls of Men? How contrary to all common Sense, Reason, and Religion?

Thanks be to God this is not our Case; his Word dwells plentifully among us, and is Read or Preach'd some where or other, almost ev'ry Hour in the Day, in this Great and Ancient City. Our Excellent Church with-holds nothing from her Children that they ought to know or do in order to their everlasting Happiness; but like an indulgent Mother, embraces them with Tenderness and a zealous Concern, and has in all her Ordinances, which are most pure and agreeable to the Holy Scriptures, consulted their future well being. We have the free Enjoyment and Exercise of our Religion, which has all the Charms imaginable in it to allure to its chaste Embraces all those who are not Carnal and Worldly, all that are not Prejudic'd and Self-conceited, all that are Meek and Lowly in Spirit, all that are desirous of being made meet, to be partakers of an Inheritance with the Saints in Light.

Happy are the People that are in such a Case; yea, blessed are the People who have the Lord for their God.

I shall conclude with an excellent Collect of our Church.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, Read, Mark, Learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word, we may embrace and hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

F I N I S.